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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Officers

27 March 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

VIA : Robert R. Bowie
Deputy Director for National Foreign Assessment

Richard Lehman
National Intelligence Officer for Warning

FROM : [REDACTED]
Assistant National Intelligence Officer for USSR-EE

SUBJECT : Monthly Warning Assessment: USSR-EE

Summary

Community analysts, meeting on 20 March, were particularly concerned about the unusual scope and multiple implications of the large Soviet exercise on the Chinese border. While discounting the possibility that it could be intended as a screen for a planned surprise attack on China, analysts thought it much more likely that the exercise was a significant landmark in the long-term process of strengthening the Soviet posture on the border.

[REDACTED] The sudden decay of the security situation in Afghanistan has given the Soviets a difficult decision as to how far to become militarily involved in trying to rescue the Taraki regime. The growing assertiveness of Kurds and Azerbaydzhanis in Iran could lead the Soviets to covertly encourage such autonomous tendencies by Iranian minorities. This could have particularly grave implications in the case of Iranian Azerbaydzhan, which adjoins the Soviet Azerbaydzhan republic.

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2. The Soviets and Southeast Asia. While the exercise was evidently long planned, some of the mobilization activities associated with the exercise could also have a more direct link to the ongoing situation in Southeast Asia, and could serve as short-term contingency preparations. It is possible that the Soviets suspect or have been given reason by the Vietnamese to believe that a renewal of large-scale Sino-Vietnamese fighting in the next few months is a serious possibility, conceivably in consequence of a Vietnamese intention to resume probes of contested positions along the Sino-Vietnamese border which the Chinese are retaining. If so, any accelerated reinforcements accomplished during the exercise might also be intended to place the USSR in a stronger position to exert deterrent pressure on the PRC in the event of such renewed fighting in the next few months.

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Soviet ships using the Vietnamese ports of Danang and Haiphong have mostly been employed so far in helping the Vietnamese logistical effort, and it is conceivable that the Soviets have been told that the determining factor will be the extent and duration of Vietnamese mobilization needed against the Chinese in the north. Since the warning meeting was held, the Vietnamese have also allowed Soviet warships to visit Cam Ranh Bay for the first time. Now that the Soviets have a foot in the door, their port presence is likely to be expanded should fighting be renewed. [REDACTED]

3. Afghanistan. The mutiny of Afghan army forces in Herat and possibly elsewhere in the last week has greatly exacerbated the ongoing security problems of the Afghan regime which we flagged in earlier Warning Assessments, and has posed a hard choice for the USSR. The Soviets must now decide how far to expand their military participation in support of the Teraki regime in view of the possibility that this could lead them into a morass of civil war. Large-scale Soviet involvement in fighting with the Moslem rebels in Afghanistan could mean increasing problems for Soviet relations with Pakistan, Iran, and India, and could have unsettling effects among the Moslem population of Soviet Central Asia. On the other hand, the Soviets have a friendship treaty with Kabul, an intimate political and military "advisory" relationship with the regime, and a common border, and could see themselves as having already acquired a vested security interest in maintaining a pro-Soviet government in Afghanistan. [REDACTED]

4. Iran. The continued unstable security situation in Iran has now been further complicated by growing assertiveness by minority nationalities, particularly the Kurds and Azerbaydzhanis. There is some possibility that the Soviets could seek covertly to encourage such tendencies, particularly if they continue to perceive a significant chance that the Bazargan regime may not win its struggle to establish its authority. The rise of a serious autonomy movement in Iranian Azerbaydzhan, particularly if it had a leftist complexion, could have grave implications for further Soviet-US dealings regarding Iran, in view of the history of Soviet military occupation of the area during World War II and of Soviet withdrawal in 1946 at US insistence. [REDACTED]

5. Yemen. Although this round of fighting between the two Yemeni regimes appears over, an eventual renewal remains possible. The attitude taken by the USSR toward this war and the extent of Soviet involvement in support of the South Yemenis during the fighting remain somewhat

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ambiguous, and matters of some controversy within the community.

[redacted] Should the fighting in fact at some point be renewed, intense collection efforts would be required to attempt to get a clearer fix on Soviet attitudes and behavior. [redacted]

6. Israel-Egypt. Should the trend of Arab opinion in response to the treaty signing move strongly toward the rejectionist pole, the Soviets would be concerned as to how far to allow themselves to be moved away from their customary support of the Geneva conference. Any hints that the Soviets are weighing any such shift would be significant. [redacted]

8. The Balkans. [redacted] Yugoslavia has placed some of its forces on partial alert in the last month, presumably in reaction to rumors about impending Soviet troop movements to Bulgaria and the possibility of Soviet-Bulgarian maneuvers there. While we still have no evidence to support such rumors, and they continue to appear unlikely, they cannot be totally dismissed. [redacted]

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